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**Refining the “Moderation Thesis” Regarding  
“Radical Parties”**

**The Jana Sangh and the BJP between Hindu Nationalism and  
Coalition Politics in India**

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## Refining the “Moderation Thesis” Regarding “Radical Parties”

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#### Summary

The inclusion of Hindu nationalist parties in India’s democratic process has not resulted in their moderation in a linear way. Since 1947, the parties have oscillated between a sectarian strategy of religious mobilization and a more moderate one respecting the secular norms of the Constitution. Whether the Hindu nationalist parties opted for the path of radicalization or that of moderation has chiefly depended on their relation with their mother organization, the RSS, the perception of the Muslims that prevails at a given time in India, of the attitude of the other parties regarding secularism and – in correlation with the variables mentioned above – of the most effective electoral tactic.

#### Résumé

L’intégration des partis nationalistes hindous dans le processus démocratique ne les a pas amenés à davantage de modération de façon linéaire. Depuis 1947, ces partis ont oscillé entre une stratégie sectaire de mobilisation religieuse et une autre, plus modérée impliquant le respect des normes sécularistes de la Constitution. Le choix de l’une ou l’autre de ces stratégies a dépendu jusqu’à présent de la relation du parti vis-à-vis de l’organisation dont il procède, le RSS, de la perception dominante des Musulmans à un moment donné, de l’attitude des autres partis vis-à-vis du sécularisme et – en liaison avec ces variables – de la meilleure tactique électorale.

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## INTRODUCTION

The literature supporting the moderation theory argues that inclusive regimes which incorporate radical parties in electoral games usually transform these parties into more moderate political actors. This moderation process may result from three factors that are likely to make cumulative impacts. First, when an extremist party contests elections in a democratic framework, it accepts institutions that are based on liberal principles, including the rule of law. For instance, the extremist party is *qua* participation bound to commit itself to political diversity (Schwedler 2006). Second, when a radical party contests elections, it is bound to dilute its ideology to attract voters outside of its core constituency. Michels and Schumpeter were the first party theoreticians to assume that extremist parties had to downplay their exclusivism once they enter the electoral arena (Michels [1915] 1962:333-341; Schumpeter [1950] 1975:283). Third, when radical parties are power-driven and aspire to govern, those who fail to win an absolute majority are likely to rely on alliances with parties that do not share its extremism. Fourth, while extremist parties emerge in most cases from ideological movements displaying a deep sense of doctrinal purity, they gradually emancipate themselves from them in the process of transforming from niche into mass parties (Clark 2006).

The literature on the inclusion-moderation theory mostly deals with former extreme left parties adjusting to the fall of communist regimes in the context of the democratization of European countries or with European religious parties such as the Catholic democrats (Kalyvas 1996, 2000). Here, I shall test the theory in the context of the Indian political system, which represents another institutionalized form of democracy, looking back today at 60 years of democratic politics.

Hindu nationalist parties were part of the Indian political system even before independence when the British introduced reforms allowing some electoral competition in the first decades of the 20th century. The nationalist parties believed in democracy even then (Mitra and Mitra 1938:420), largely because, considering that this regime relies on majority rule and that Hindus form a majority in India, they expected that democracy should result, eventually, in the conquest of power by Hindus. But the parties' integration into the Indian democratic process did not result in their linear moderation. In fact, these parties have oscillated between a path of radicalization and one of moderation. When they followed the former, elections were a factor of radicalization as the parties' mobilization strategy has aimed to polarize the electorate along religious lines. When the parties opted for moderation, it was to lead larger coalitions and rule the country. This dimension of the moderation thesis – the impact of the compulsions of coalition politics – has impacted the Hindu nationalist parties only when they have needed the support of other parties. Whether the Hindu nationalist parties opted for the path of radicalization or that of moderation has been a function of three variables: their relation with their mother organization, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS – National Volunteers Corps); their perception of Muslims and the correlative self-perception of the Hindus that prevail at any given time; and the strategies of the other political parties, be they in office or in the opposition.

## I. THE JANA SANGH TRAJECTORY: FROM A RADICAL NICHE PARTY TO AN UNCOMPROMISING COALITION PARTNER (1951-1977)

In 1951, the Jana Sangh emerged from a Hindu nationalist movement which was much older. Hindu nationalism, as an ideology, crystallized in the 1920s when Hindu leaders of different backgrounds,

including revolutionaries and members of the Congress party, reacted similarly to the perceived threat of the Muslim minority (about 20% of the population of the British Raj). The turning point was the Khilafat movement that Indian Muslims organized in order to protest against the abolition of the Caliphate in Istanbul in 1924 that had been decided by the victors of World War I, including Britain. In India, demonstrations aimed at the British hit the Hindus, an easier target, and resulted in an unprecedented wave of riots in 1921-1927 (Minault 1982). Some Hindu leaders then relaunched a rather dormant wing of the Congress, the Hindu *Mahasabha*, which became a radical Hindu nationalist party independent from the Congress in 1937. Others created Hindu defense movements, called “militias” by the British. Among them, the best organized one was the RSS which drew its ideology from the notion of Hindutva, or Hindu-ness, invented in 1923 by a revolutionary turned anti-Muslim, V. D. Savarkar.

Savarkar argues that the Indian national identity is embodied in Hindu culture, which encompasses not only Hinduism as a religion, but also a language, Sanskrit (and its main vernacular derivative, Hindi), the worship of Hindustan as a sacred land and the cult of the Vedic Golden Age. The importance of non-religious elements, such as language, suggests that the Hindu nationalist movement was an *ethno*-religious movement right from the beginning. In line with his motto “Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan!,” Savarkar demanded that the religious minorities pay allegiance to the dominant Hindu identity and limit the manifestations of their faith to the private sphere (Savarkar [1923] 1969). Indeed, the RSS refused non-Hindu members, even though it claimed to represent all the Indians.

### **I.1. The RSS, A Sectarian and Authoritarian Hindu Nationalist Matrix**

In contrast to most other nationalist movements, including fascist ones, the RSS did not identify with one leader<sup>2</sup> and did not regard the conquest of state power as a priority. In fact, the movement preferred to remain aloof from the political arena. For its first supreme leader (Sarsanghchalak), K. B. Hedgewar (1925-1940), and his successor M. S. Golwalkar (1940-1973), the priority task was to reform Hindu society from below – not from above through the state apparatus. They both looked at Hindus as weak and vulnerable vis-à-vis the Muslims, who were well-represented in commerce, the military, the academy and the administration. The two were also apprehensive of the new militancy of the lower castes and feared the growing appeal of Gandhi’s brand of Hinduism that emphasized non-violence. By contrast, the RSS aspired to restore a martial brand of Hinduism and to reshape the mind and the body of the Hindus in order to make them warrior-like.

For decades, the main aim of the RSS was to expand the network of its branches where this training was imparted to (mostly young) Hindus. Hedgewar decided to train a special body of RSS cadres to this effect, the so-called *pracharaks*. The members of this avant-garde were supposed to dedicate their whole life to the RSS. Even though they were often well-educated, they gave up the idea of embracing a professional career. They did not marry either. Instead, the RSS became their family, a sort of “brotherhood in saffron” – the sacred color of Hinduism and that of the RSS flag – as suggested by Walter Andersen and Shridhar Damle (Andersen and Damle 1987). In 2004, the RSS had 33,758 branches all over India (*The Hindu*, 13 March 2004) and probably two to three million members.

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2. Six leaders have successively occupied the post of supreme leader of the RSS: K. B. Hedgewar (1925-1940), M. S. Golwalkar (1940-1973), Babasaheb Deoras (1973-1994), Rajendra Singh (1994-2000) and K. S. Sudarshan (2000-2009) and Mohan Bhagwat (2009-).

Ideologically, the RSS is not democratic. Its ideology is based on a xenophobic brand of ethnic nationalism. In its view, non-Hindus can only be second class-citizens. If they do not give up their religious identity in the public sphere, they may even be looked at as fifth columnists of Pakistan (when they are Muslims) or the Pope (when they are Catholics). Second, the RSS does not organize internal elections. The organization has a quasi representative body, the *Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha* (Delegate Assembly of All India), which designates the organization's General Secretary. But there is never more than one candidate per post. Moreover, the Delegate Assembly is not in charge of appointing the more important post of the supreme leader. Most of the organization's supreme leaders have been designated by their predecessor and/or by a very small clique of RSS leaders. Last but not least, the RSS cultivates a secretive *modus operandi* and forbids its members from taking part in public debates.

Among the first components of the "Sangh family" (or *Sangh parivar* in Hindi) to be launched by the RSS were a student union in 1948, a labor union in 1955, and between the two, a political party in 1951, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Alliance – BJS) (Jaffrelot 2006a). Indeed, RSS leaders sought to create front organizations to reach out to domains in which they were not active. The RSS did not create its party alone, but cofounded it with Shyam Prasad Mookerjee, the former president of the Hindu *Mahasabha*. Mookerjee was more than happy to receive the support of the Sangh family for launching a more dynamic political organization. The Jana Sangh – as it came to be popularly called – was established just before the first general election in 1951. Mookerjee died in 1953 and the RSS leaders who had been seconded to the party apparatus immediately took over and marginalized the old lieutenants of Mookerjee.

## **I.2. The Jana Sangh's Sectarianism (1951-1967): Rejection of Diversity and Radical Mobilizations**

The Jana Sangh replicated the RSS structure under the aegis of its supreme leader M. S. Golwalkar, who had agreed to the creation of the party only reluctantly (*The Organizer*, 25 June 1956:5) and who was keen not to let it acquire any significant autonomy. Most of the party cadres came from the RSS, including Deendayal Upadhyaya, who functioned as the party's General Secretary until his mysterious death in 1968 (Jaffrelot 1996:89). RSS cadres also occupied the positions of Organizing Secretaries who formed the party's steel frame. The party-building pattern that crystallized under Upadhyaya therefore enabled the RSS to exert a strong influence over the Jana Sangh because of the relationship between the party cadres and their mother organization. As a result, the party tended to replicate the taste for ideological discourses and secrecy of its mother organization. Its leaders were eager to retain the ideological purity of the RSS and its upper caste, even brahminical, ethos. Therefore, the attractiveness of the Jana Sangh as a political party was limited to traditional elites of North India since the southern provinces could not accept languages deriving from Sanskrit, including Hindi, as their idiom. The Jana Sangh remained a niche party for that reason and contended itself with that status for ten years. In fact, it was as much a niche party in the sense of Adams, Clark, Ezrow and Glasgow (2006) as a "message seeker" (Greene 2007) less interested in winning elections than in using electoral platforms to propagate its ideology.

**Table 1: Performance of the Jana Sangh in National Elections**  
(seats won and % of valid votes)

Year	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971
Seats (%)	3 (3.1)	4 (5.9)	14 (6.4)	35 (9.4)	22 (7.4)

But the party was supposed to speak for all the Hindus and to influence the state. It was even supposed to capture power in order to correct the public policies which the ruling party, the Congress, had designed and which, according to the followers of Hindutva were detrimental to the Hindus. Among these were the recognition of English and regional languages at the expense of Hindi, the correlative creation of linguistic states in the framework of a federal union, institutions that the Hindu nationalists wanted to abolish because of “their dangerous potential for secession” (*The Organizer*, 24 January, 1956:5); the granting of an autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir that Nehru had promoted to defuse the separatist tendencies in the province (something that in the eyes of the Hindu nationalists weakened national unity)<sup>3</sup>; the continuation of the Shariat as personal law of the Muslims whereas the Hindu personal law was reformed according to western principles; the freedom to convert to another religion; and last but not least, the possibility of slaughtering cows.

Cows are sacred animals in Hinduism and many Hindu leaders – including traditionalist congressmen – were in favor of a ban on cow slaughter, something the secular Indians (congressmen and leftist) and the minorities, especially the Muslims, regarded as objectionable since they were meat eaters. The Jana Sangh decided to instrumentalize this symbol of identity in order to mobilize the majority community at the time of elections. A case in point was the 1967 election campaign.<sup>4</sup> The party joined hands with another front organization of the RSS, the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP – World Hindu Association) which was intended to federate all the Hindu sects and to gather their representatives on the same platform. Some of the most prominent religious figures went on fast for weeks, and in the street the Jana Sangh, with the support of the RSS, made unprecedented efforts to mobilize its supporters. In February 1967, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators rallied around the Parliament of India and assaulted this temple of Indian democracy in order to force the MPs to pass a law prohibiting cow slaughter. No mass movement had been so popular since independence in 1947. As the activists were determined to storm the Parliament, the police intervened and killed eight of them, who in turn became the martyrs of this cause.

The Jana Sangh made some progress during the general elections immediately thereafter, jumping from 6.4 to 9.4% of the valid votes (see Table 1). But the cow protection movement failed to make a major impact for three reasons. First, Hindus were not as responsive as the Jana Sangh party expected, because cow slaughter was not an existential issue and many states of the Indian Union had already passed prohibitive laws in that respect. Second, the government did not compromise with secularism. While India admitted religious parties, its Constitution committed the country to secularism, thereby prohibiting the use of religion in the political sphere. Prime Minister Nehru observed strict secular norms and fought the Hindu nationalists as his archenemies. He was very well aware of the Hindu nationalists’

3. The importance of the Kashmir issue for the Jana Sangh was evident from the personal involvement of its first president, S. P. Mookerjee, who took part in the Kashmir Andolan (Agitation) in 1953 and died in jail in Jammu and Kashmir (probably of heart attack) after he had been arrested for taking part in this movement.

4. For a detailed account on this episode of the Jana Sangh’s career see Jaffrelot (1996:204-209).



attempts to instrumentalize religion during election campaigns. In 1956, he ordered the imprisonment of activists who had reprinted a book titled *Living Biographies of Religious Leaders of the World*, whose provocative depiction of the Prophet Mohammad had resulted in violent Hindu/Muslim tensions in North India (Nehru 1985:436). Nehru was convinced that the riots had been masterminded by Hindu nationalist parties “to attract votes in the forthcoming elections” (Gupta 1965:250) by polarizing the voters along religious lines. In 1959, RSS leader Golwalkar was sentenced to a fine of 500 rupees and six months’ imprisonment for a speech encouraging communal hatred. He was eventually acquitted on appeal (*The Organizer*, 16 November, 1961:7), but the trial signaled that Hindu nationalist leaders could not articulate their most extreme views in public as long as Nehru was watching them. Press reports of that time suggest that, as a result of the state’s vigilance, the Hindu nationalists abstained from instrumentalizing religion openly: in “Lucknow [the capital city of Uttar Pradesh], the Jana Sangh is shy of parading itself as a Hindu party [...] the house to house propaganda is different from platform speeches” (*National Herald*, 8 January, 1962:1). Harold Gould’s study of the 1962 election campaign in Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh) confirms this disjunction between the public and the private discourses of the Hindu nationalists: “Privately, the Jana Sangh spokesmen were intimating to all who should listen that all Muslims would be sent to Pakistan following a Jana Sangh victory at the polls” (Gould 1966:67). In 1965, even after Nehru’s death, RSS dignitaries considered that “direct participation in communal riots would result in a ban,” as it did in 1948-1949, the darkest years of the RSS (Johnson 1970:83). Undoubtedly, Nehru’s commitment to secularism contained the most extreme use of religion by Hindu nationalists in India’s political arena.

Nehru’s daughter, Indira Gandhi, maintained the same line of conduct as her father. In 1967, she did not bow to any of the Hindu nationalists’ demands regarding cow slaughter and she justified continued police repression. She let one of the religious leaders die while on hunger strike; she refused to negotiate any interim ban on cow slaughter – a suggestion of some Jana Sangh leaders in order to break the stalemate – and she fired the Home Minister who had failed to contain the demonstrations, allegedly because he somewhat sympathized with them.

### **I.3. The Jana Sanghis’ Incomplete Moderation (1968-1979)**

The relative failure of the 1967 cow protection movement coincided with the change of strategy of Jana Sangh, whose leaders had realized that a radical approach would confine the Jana Sangh to the same marginal role as the Hindu *Mahasabha*. The party tried to become acceptable to new voters in order to enlarge its electoral base in social and geographical terms. The most significant move in this direction was the way it watered down its Hindi-only policy in order to attract more supporters from South India. This change was consummated in December 1967, during its Calicut (Kerala) plenary session – the first in South India –, when the party declined to set a deadline for making Hindi the national language and admitted that the adoption of this idiom had to take place on a voluntary basis.<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously, the Jana Sangh developed a new interest in socio-economic issues in a rather populist vein in order to speak to “the common man” – a formula party president A. B. Vajpayee used systematically.

The Jana Sangh’s moderation was also partly due to the changing strategy of other opposition parties that were prepared to partner with it. Until the 1960s, the Jana Sangh was *persona non grata* (or “the political untouchable” as its leaders used to say) to most opposition parties, including the

5. For a synthetic view of the Jana Sangh’s resolutions regarding the language issue, see chapter 12 of Jaffrelot (2007).



socialist groupings, which strongly criticized its communalism. In the early 1960s, the socialist leader, R .M. Lohia developed the notion of non-congressism, which advocated the need, for the opposition parties, to join hands against the Congress. In 1967, this rapprochement resulted in the making of post-election coalitions in some states where the Jana Sangh became part of the governments. None of them lasted for long because of ideological differences which sometimes reflected the contrasting social basis of the allied parties. For instance, the Jana Sangh was very reluctant vis-à-vis the recognition of Urdu as an official language in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and vis-à-vis any land reform – two things the socialists and the communists who were part of the government of these states were keen to promote. By the late 1960s, the Congress was back in almost all the states but this episode of coalition politics had shown to the Jana Sangh leaders that they could be acceptable to other opposition parties even after a sectarian election campaign.

Before the 1971 elections, the opponents to the Congress (including the Congress (O), a breakaway faction which had fought against Indira Gandhi's new socialist agenda) formed a Grand Alliance. It did not make any impact because Indira Gandhi had become remarkably popular. But the Jana Sangh became even more familiar with coalition politics in this framework. It played a key role in the JP Movement, a movement named after Jaya Prakash Narayan, a Gandhian veteran who led the opposition's campaign against Prime Minister Gandhi's authoritarianism and the corruption of the political class. The Prime Minister reacted to this movement by declaring the state of emergency. Most of the opposition leaders, except the communists, were jailed.

In jail, all the leaders of the opposition parties, including the Jana Sangh, the Socialist Party and the Congress (O) joined hands. Immediately after Indira Gandhi announced elections in 1977, they merged into a new party once out of jail. The new party, the Janata Party, won an overwhelming majority in March 1977. The Hindu nationalists had made themselves fully acceptable to their partners, especially to conservative leaders of the Congress (O) like Morarji Desai, the new Prime Minister, and those of the Lok Dal, a party of the dominant peasantry, including its leader, Charan Singh, the Vice Prime Minister in 1977. President of the former Jana Sangh A. B. Vajpayee became Minister of Foreign Affairs and L. K. Advani became Minister of Information and Broadcasting.

The RSS had favored the merger of the Jana Sangh in the Janata Party because its priority was to dislodge Indira Gandhi from power. Mrs. Gandhi had become the *bête noire* of the RSS the moment she had decided to ban the organization – along with many others –, calling to the mind of its leaders the dark years of 1948-1949. During the Emergency, new RSS supreme leader Balasaheb Deoras wrote to Mrs. Gandhi, pleading – in a not very dignified way – for the lifting of the ban in exchange of his putting the RSS at the service of the development work undertaken by the government (Dutt 1978:138-148). After Mrs. Gandhi ignored this plea, the RSS set out to fight the Emergency. The RSS was also in favor of the Janata Party because its rise to power resulted in the formation of a more friendly government and the appointment of Hindu nationalist ministers. This development allowed the RSS and its subsidiaries to expand their activities, including anti-Muslim provocations which resulted in an unprecedented number of communal riots.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, coalition politics, once again, did not translate into any significant ideological and behavioral changes. The ex-Jana Sanghis had not given up their core doctrine, as evident from the three measures they promoted within the Janata Party government. First, they introduced in parliament a bill aiming

6. The number of Hindu-Muslim riots rose from 169 in 1976 to 188 in 1977, 230 in 1978 and 304 in 1979 (Jaffrelot 1996:301). Among them, the riots of Aligarh (1978) and Jamshedpur (1979) were investigated by independent commissions which concluded that Hindu nationalist activists had been involved (see *First Annual Report of the Minorities Commission* (1973), New Delhi, Government of India Press, p. 73, and *Report of the three-member Commission of Inquiry Headed by Shri Jitendra Narain former Judge of Patna High Court* (1981), New Delhi, p. 40).

to ban cow slaughter. Second, they argued that the history textbooks should be rewritten in such a way that the Muslim invasions be described as truly savage. Further, references to the notion of “Aryan invasions” should be removed, since, for them, Hindus were the sons of the soil whereas the minorities were latecomers in India (Rudolph 1984). Third, they advocated the passing of a law against “forced conversion” and the wording of the bill they introduced was likely to infringe upon freedom of religion.

The Socialists objected to these three measures, arguing that these were articles of faith of the RSS, not of the Janata Party. As a consequence, a “dual membership” controversy unfolded during which the ex-Jana Sanghis were described by the Socialists – and the Congress – as pretending to be part and parcel of the Janata Party when, in fact, they were still paying allegiance to the RSS. Anticipating that the sectarian attitude of the RSS would be a problem for the Janata Party, the party asked the RSS to open itself to “followers of other religions, especially of those religions which were not born in Bharat [meaning the Indian homeland] such as Islam and Christianity, but are Bharatiya [belong to the homeland] in the same way as Hindus are” (Narayan 1979:1). But the RSS ignored this invitation and when the ex-Jana Sanghis were compelled to choose between severing their links with the RSS or to leave the Janata Party, they opted for the latter.

The career of the Jana Sangh suggests that the moderation thesis may need to be amended in the case of Hindu nationalism. Certainly, the party diluted some aspects of its initial program, such as the promotion of Hindi as a common language that could alienate the South Indian voters. In the late 1960s, these developments – including the recruitment of local notables and the socialization of the party-leaders into the parliamentary system – led students of the party to anticipate an irreversible shift of the party towards moderation (Davey 1969:3, 16 and 209; Baxter 1971:315-316). But the democratic game, including elections failed to convert Hindu nationalists into supporters of the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. In fact, electoral competition did not contradict the most radical dimension of the Jana Sangh’s favorite strategy, the manipulation of Hindu symbols (such as the sacred cow) in order to mobilize supporters in a strident way before the elections. On the contrary, the holding of elections made such campaigns more likely. What dissuaded the Jana Sangh to continue with such mobilization techniques was the non-compromising attitude of the Congress governments which defended the constitutional rules. This push factor was complemented by a pull factor since, at the same time, other opposition parties were prepared to join hands with the Jana Sangh, even if it did not give up the Hindutva-oriented aspects of its program. As a result of these two facets of the political system – a secular government and an accommodating opposition –, the Jana Sangh “mainstreamed” itself in the 1970s, not because it became more moderate, but because the center of gravity of Indian politics shifted to more conservative and even traditionalist sectors of the political spectrum. The leading role played by the Congress (O) and Charan Singh in the Janata Party bore testimony of this evolution. But the most important variable in the life of the party, its organic relation with the RSS, prevented this evolution to reach its natural conclusion: the ex-Jana Sanghis were unable or unwilling to sever their links with the RSS in the late 1970s. As a result, their moderation turned out to be rather shallow, as evident from the bills they introduced in parliament.

## **II. THE BJP INVERT U CURVE, A REPEATED PATTERN – THE OTHER WAY AROUND**

As a result of the “dual membership controversy,” most Jana Sanghis left the Janata Party in 1979 and the party largely disintegrated a year later. The ex-Jana Sanghis then formed a new party called Bharatiya Janata Party (Party of the Indian People). Its trajectory contrasted with its predecessor’s in

the sense that it adopted a moderate agenda first, and then became radical – before becoming more moderate again, following an invert U curve which went on a par with its election results. Despite this variation, the factors accounting for the BJP's changing approach to politics are surprisingly similar to those commanding the career of the Jana Sangh.

## II.1. The BJP as a Moderate Party (1980-1989)

After the demise of the Janata Party, the BJP leaders were apprehensive of returning to the niche-status to which the Jana Sangh had been confined. Retaining the word “Janata” in its name, the BJP aspired to keep some of the aura of the Janata Party, which had embodied a consensus force of the opposition. BJP president A. B. Vajpayee was keen to abandon most of the Hindutva-based identity of the Jana Sangh. He introduced two new articles of faith which did not echo the Hindu nationalist legacy: “Gandhian socialism” and “positive secularism.” The former referred to the Gandhian development model, with its strong emphasis on the village as the basic unit of the Indian economy.<sup>7</sup> The old social basis of the BJP, made of shopkeepers, artisans and professionals (small towns lawyers, doctors, etc.) was likely to be responsive to the anti-capitalist overtone of this motto, but not the new middle class emerging from the liberalization measures of Mrs. Gandhi, who was back in office in 1980. “Positive secularism” was an implicit critique of the Congress’ “pseudo-secularism” (a phrase coined by the Hindu nationalists to denounce the way the ruling party “pampered” the minorities to get their votes). But it was also an explicit endorsement of the secular nature of the regime, something the core electorate of the Jana Sangh and the RSS had never reconciled themselves with.

The moderate discourse of the BJP was intended to make electoral alliances easier. In 1984, the BJP formed a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with the party of Charan Singh. But Singh withdrew from the NDA just before the December 1984 elections. The BJP leaders therefore made an ad hoc and limited electoral pact with what was left of the Janata Party.

The RSS was explicitly displeased by the BJP's strategy. RSS cadres were not asked to support the BJP during the 1984 elections. In fact, in some places like Delhi, they opted for the Congress and its new leader, Rajiv Gandhi. But that was an ephemeral tactical move. The new RSS strategy was different. It consisted in promoting a militant use of religious symbols in order to create a Hindu vote bank through which the Hindu demographic majority would be turned into a political majority. RSS supreme leader Deoras (who had succeeded Golwalkar in 1973) argued in 1979:

Hindus must now awaken themselves to such an extent that even from the elections point of view the politicians will have to respect the Hindu sentiments and change their policy accordingly. [...] If others put up demands, they are accepted, but even genuine demands by Hindus are ignored. This is because Muslims and other minorities usually vote *en bloc* while Hindus are divided. Once Hindus get united, the government would [need to] start caring for them also. (*Hindu Vishva*, n°14, 7-8 March 1979:92)

The RSS relied on the VHP, another offshoot of the Sangh Parivar, to achieve this end. In 1984, the RSS and the VHP launched a new mobilization campaign which did not focus on the sacred cow, but on another powerful Hindu symbol, Lord Ram. They demanded that the temple that once allegedly stood

7. For a detailed analysis of the social basis of the Jana Sangh, see Graham (1990).

above the supposed birthplace of the god Ram in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, should be rebuilt. The Hindu temple was said to have been replaced by a mosque in the 16th century after the (Muslim) Mughal dynasty rose to power. This issue was well chosen, given the popularity of Lord Ram among Hindus, particularly in the north of India. The VHP immediately rallied several religious figures whose prestige further amplified its capacity for mobilization. Together they demanded that the current Babri Mosque be replaced by a “rebuilt” Ram temple. The central theme of the agitation was that Ram, by being figuratively “placed” in a mosque, had been reduced to a “prisoner behind bars” since the mosque had been sealed in 1949 as a disputed place of worship (Van Der Veer 1987).

At the beginning, the BJP tried to abstain from this agitation, fearing it would not be in a position to make allies if it returned to extremist moves. Eventually, however, the party gave up its moderate line of conduct, for reasons that already played a decisive role in the trajectory of the Jana Sangh.

First, the RSS requested the BJP to return to the doctrinal purity of Hindutva politics and warned the party that its network of volunteers would not canvass for its candidates if the party remained adamantly moderate. Second, the electoral context was conducive to Hindu nationalist radicalization. On the one hand, no significant opposition party had accepted to partner with the BJP in spite of its moderation. On the other hand, the ruling Congress had not maintained the impeccable secularism of the 1950s-1970s. Rajiv Gandhi, far from following the examples of his mother and grandfather, communalized Indian politics. In 1985, he tried to woo the Muslim opinion leaders by reasserting the role of the Shariat as the Personal law of their community in the Shah Bano affair,<sup>8</sup> and four years later, he played the Hindu card by invoking the name of Ram in Faizabad (the headquarter of the district where Ayodhya is located) from where he launched his election campaign. The erosion of secularism as one of the key normative rules of the Indian polity legitimized the use of some religious language by the Hindu nationalists. Third, in the 1980s, Hindus felt vulnerable. On the one hand minorities developed militant strategies: Sikh separatists attacked Hindus, Islamists were accused of converting Dalits<sup>9</sup> (as in Meenakshipuram, Tamil Nadu, in 1981) and by the end of the decade, Kashmir had become the new battle ground for Jihadists. On the other hand, the Congress government laid itself to the critique of “pseudo-secularism” by cultivating the Muslim vote bank like in the Shah Bano case, which prepared the ground for a Hindu backlash.

## **II.2. The Radical Phase of the BJP (1989-1998): Elections against Democracy or the Polarization of the Indian Voters along Religious Lines?**

During the 1989 election campaign, RSS activists, VHP religious figures, and BJP candidates canvassed thousands of towns and villages to consecrate bricks stamped with Ram’s name and destined to be used to “rebuild” the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The bricks were carried in processions imitating

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8. Shah Bano had been the spouse, since 1932, of a lawyer from Indore who married for the second time in 1975 and separated from her according to Muslim customary law in 1978. Invoking section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, she sued him and as a result established her right to alimony. When, in 1980, she demanded a review of her allowance, her former husband appealed to the Supreme Court, pleading that according to Shariat law, he was not obliged to continue payments to her after the *iddat* (a period of three months after the divorce). The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal on 23 April 1985, pointing out that Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure applied to people of all faiths, and that the Quran itself required that a divorced wife should be paid an allowance (in Jaffrelot 1996:334).

9. Dalit is a self-designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as of lower class and unsuitable for making personal relationships. Dalits are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over South Asia, and speak various languages (editors’ note).

those organized for religious celebrations in which idols are carried along a precise itinerary.<sup>10</sup> In several places, these processions resulted in riots following an identical scenario in each case: a procession in the form of a show of strength (sometimes including over 10,000 people) stretched along several kilometers; despite the local authorities' recommendations or interdicts, they entered the Muslim neighborhoods where they chanted slogans such as "there are only two places for Muslims, Pakistan and the cemetery" [Pakistan aur Kabristan]; these provocations prompted the inhabitants to throw stones from neighboring homes, to which procession members, who often turned out to be well-armed, retaliated with bloody assaults. In Bhagalpur (Bihar) more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslim, died.

This pre-electoral communal violence was a clear component of the strategy of the BJP which wanted to polarize the electorate along religious lines of cleavage and thus deepened the Hindu group identity so that its members would end up "voting Hindu," a scenario Steven Wilkinson observed in Uttar Pradesh (Wilkinson 2004). Recourse to so-called religious processions thus proved crucial for mobilizing people. The Ayodhya temple campaign contributed to bringing the score of the BJP from two seats (out of 543) in 1984 up to 85 seats in 1989 in the lower house of Parliament.

**Table 2: Performance of the BJP in National Elections**  
(seats won and % of valid votes)

1984 BJP	1989 BJP	1991 BJP	1996 BJP	1998 BJP	1999 BJP	2004 BJP	2009 BJP
2 (7.4)	85 (11.4)	119 (20.1)	160 (20.29)	178 (25.59)	182 (23.75)	138 (22.16)	116 (18.84)

Immediately after the elections, the BJP became part of a coalition which comprised many different parties, including the Janata Dal of the new Prime Minister, V. P. Singh. As in 1967, Hindu nationalists combined an ethno-religious radical electoral campaign on the one hand with, on the other, the making of a post-electoral coalition with parties that did not share its ideology. And like in 1967, they proved the moderation thesis wrong because coalition politics did not lead them to dilute their ideology. In fact, in 1990, the BJP President, L. K. Advani launched a huge movement across India (the "Rath Yatra"), in order to mobilize support for building a Ram temple in Ayodhya. In many cities, Advani's meetings were responsible for Hindu/Muslim riots. Advani was arrested before reaching Ayodhya, but activists stormed the Babri Mosque and dozens of them were killed in police repression. The movement had its martyrs, whose ashes were taken all over India in processions that in turn became the root cause for a new wave of riots. In midst of the upheaval, the BJP withdrew its support to Singh's government and the latter fell as a consequence. But when mid-term elections were held the following year (1991), the BJP jumped from 85 to 119 seats in the lower house of Parliament.

This radical phase of the BJP culminated in the demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu nationalists on 6 December 1992. This move was presented as a spontaneous upsurge of Hindu activists by the BJP leaders who claimed that they had nothing to do with it. But the inquiry commission – whose conclusions were leaked in 2009 – showed that the BJP had contributed to orchestrate the episode.

The radicalization of the BJP in the late 1980s-early 1990s stemmed from the interplay of our three variables. First, the RSS, whose leader had decided to promote the making of a Hindu vote bank through

10. For a detailed report on a *Mahayajna*, see, for example, the one on Bhopal, *Madhya Pradesh Chronicle*, 11 November 1989:9, and *Dainik Bhaskar*, 11 November 1989:3.



the instrumentalization of the Ayodhya issue, remote-controlled the party, whereas the VHP provided the party with religious leaders who gave an additional – sacred – legitimacy to the movement. Second, the BJP could cash in on a deep sense of Hindu vulnerability fostering a collective backlash. Third, the political context allowed the party to pursue its radical agenda. On the one hand, its coalition partners of 1989 had not seriously objected to its political use of the Ayodhya issue during the election campaign, and the government of V. P. Singh waited until the last minute (till Advani was about to enter Uttar Pradesh) with the arrest of Advani's Rath Yatra in 1990. On the other hand, the Congress, after it returned to power in 1991, did not prevent the Hindu nationalists from attacking the Babri Mosque and the organization that had been responsible for its demolition was never indicted. The RSS and the VHP (as well as the Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the latter) were banned intermittently, but only for a few months and only on paper. The BJP eventually returned to the path of moderation in 1996, not because of the attitude of other parties, but because it realized that it had to woo potential allies to form a ruling coalition after it had become the largest Indian party with 160 seats in the 1996 elections.

### II.3. The Relative Moderation of a Coalition Leader: The BJP 1998-2004

In 1998, after the BJP won a record 178 seats – a performance repeated in 1999 (182 seats) – party president Advani embarked on a moderate phase in the career of the BJP, as a learning experience from the debacle in 1996, when Prime Minister Vajpayee could not form a coalition government bar potential allies: "Though we were the largest party, we failed to form a government. It was felt that on an ideological basis we couldn't go further. So we embarked on the course of alliance-based coalitions..." (Interview of L. K. Advani in *Outlook*, 25 October 1999:38).

Advani explicitly established a relation between the way the BJP had diluted its Hindu nationalism and the making of alliances under its aegis. Both phenomena culminated in 1998 in the formation of the National Democratic Alliance. The BJP and its alliance partners evolved a "National Agenda for Government" in March 1998 and Vajpayee formed his government on this basis (*Organiser*, Varsha Pradipada Special, 29 March 1998:27-30). Mainstays of the Sangh Parivar's program – the Ram temple to be built in Ayodhya, the abolition of Article 370 of the Constitution granting some autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, and the establishment of a uniform civil code aiming to deprive the religious minorities of one feature of their particular juridical identity – were not included in this agenda because most BJP allies did not appreciate their Hindu nationalist connotations. Not only did they not share the Hindutva ideology, but they were also keen not to alienate their Muslim voters. At that time, Advani started to evoke the need for a new BJP that would be a party of governance, not based on any precise ideology:

...a large area of governance has little to do with ideology – any ideology – except the overriding principle of national interests. Indeed, good governance in most spheres of national life becomes possible only when it is de-ideologized and de-politicized. Thus, if any issue, in spite of its inherent validity, acquires a strongly ideological character – in fact, so strong an ideological character as to make coalition governance, and hence stable governance, difficult – it is only proper to leave it out. This is precisely what we have done in the National Agenda. (Advani 1998:7)

In 1999, the BJP even gave up the very idea of having its own separate election manifesto. And the election manifesto of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) promised “a moratorium on contentious issues” (NDA 1999:1), a phrase which obviously referred to the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the abolition of Article 370 of the Constitution and the imposition of a uniform civil code. The NDA also committed itself to “genuine [as opposed to ‘positive’] secularism.”

Certainly, the compulsions of coalition politics prevented the BJP from organizing agitations and forced the party to moderate its discourse. But its leaders tacitly approved the anti-Muslim pogrom which took place in the BJP-governed state of Gujarat in 2002. The violence, in which 2,000 people died, was of a magnitude India had not experimented since Partition. Not only does the course of these operations show carefully planned organization, but it also indicates at least indirect official state support. It would have been impossible to transport that many men (and gas cylinders) with that many trucks without the benefit of state logistic support or at least the state’s neutrality. Above all, the protected nature of the clashes over days, weeks, and even months can only be explained by the government’s attitude. The administration was paralyzed. The standard response policemen gave to Muslims who called them to their rescue was: “We have no order to save you” (Human Rights Watch 2003). No member of the NDA, including, non-BJP coalition leaders, did anything to support the Muslim victims who relied only on the support of local NGOs. More importantly, no partner of the BJP, including former socialists like Defense Minister George Fernandes, criticized the way Gujarat’s Chief Minister Narendra Modi (BJP) dealt with the situation. The BJP was not forced to behave in a moderate manner in the states it governed alone.

Elections were not scheduled until 2003, but Modi – a staunch RSS member – tried to capitalize on the highly communalized atmosphere his government had helped to create. In order to provoke by-elections, he resigned from his post as Chief Minister and recommended that the governor should dissolve the Gujarat assembly, which the latter – an RSS leader – did on 19 July. The Chief Election Commissioner, who visited more than half of the state’s districts between 31 July and 4 August, was reluctant to organize any poll, especially since thousands of voters, a vast majority of them Muslims, were still living far from their homes in refugee camps (Jaffrelot 2006b). Then the Modi government argued that in accordance with article 174 of the Constitution, the time between dissolving the assembly and holding new elections could not exceed six months. National BJP leaders, including Home Minister L. K. Advani, joined in the call for early elections. Given the objections of the Election Commission, the BJP brought the case before the Supreme Court. The Court refused to express an opinion, referring to the decision of the Election Commission. In early November, the Commission set a date for the Gujarat elections to begin on December 12. The outcome was in Modi’s favor: the BJP garnered a majority of seats for the third time in a row with a record score of 126 seats out of 182. Only the pogroms made this landslide possible: the BJP won all the seats in the three districts most heavily affected by this extreme form of violence which polarized the voters along religious lines.

The RSS reconciled itself with the moderation of the BJP’s discourse at the national level insofar as it allowed the party to run the government. Such a position of power enabled the RSS to have many of its articles of faith implemented. Few weeks after taking over, the Vajpayee government organized the first nuclear test since 1974; RSS members and/or sympathizers were appointed at the helm of many institutions including the Indian Council for Social Science Research and the Indian Council for Historical Research; the rewriting of the history textbooks was initiated by the Minister of Human Resources Development, M. M. Joshi, a staunch RSS man; the BJP government of Gujarat was not held accountable for the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom. As long as the RSS found compensations to the moderation of the BJP, this strategy could continue: coalition politics at the center, extremism in the states the BJP ruled alone.



## II.4. The BJP in Opposition, Searching for a Strategy

On the basis of the BJP's changing discourse in the late 1990s, scholars like Baldev Raj Nayar considered that the party was following a "centrist tendency." According to him, there was "a uni-linear direction in change in party strategy towards moderation and coalition building" (Nayar 1999). In fact the moderation of the BJP's discourse was *due to* the compulsions of coalition building.

After returning to opposition in 2004, the BJP tried to continue with the NDA and resist the influence of the RSS. The latter attributed the party's 2004 electoral defeat to the dilution of its ideology regarding mainstays of the Hindutva movement (like the Ram temple and the rejection of economic liberalization which could only result in cultural globalization). BJP president Advani was openly criticized by RSS supreme leader K. Sudarshan. In an unprecedented move, the latter said, during a TV interview, that Advani and former Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee should make room for new faces. Advani, during the party's National Executive meeting on 18 September 2005, declared:

...an impression has gained ground that no political or organizational decision can be taken without the consent of the RSS functionaries. This perception will do no good either to the Party or to the RSS. [...] the BJP as a political party is accountable to the people, its performance being periodically put to test in elections. So in a democratic, multi-party polity, an ideologically driven party like the BJP has to function in a manner that enables it to keep its basic ideological stances intact and at the same time expand itself to reach the large sections of the people outside the layers of all ideology.

This overall plea for the recognition of the party's autonomy was not appreciated by new RSS leader Sudarshan. At the end of 2005, Advani was removed from the BJP's presidency and Rajnath Singh took over from him. After the defeat of the BJP in the 2009 general elections, when Advani had been projected by the party as its candidate for prime ministership, he was removed from the post of leader of the opposition in the lower house of Indian parliament and the RSS imposed a rather unknown figure at the helm of the party, Nitin Gadkari, a regional leader based in Maharashtra.

As during the 1979 "dual membership" controversy, coalition partners of the Hindu nationalists reacted negatively to this political role of the RSS. Some non-NDA allies of the BJP, like the Telugu Desham Party whose leader worried about his Muslim voters, severed its links with the BJP. Others warned the BJP that they may leave the alliance if it bowed to the RSS. Right after the general election, the National Executive Committee of the JD(U), one of the BJP's coalition partners in the NDA, issued a resolution to this effect. It declared that:

We joined the National Democratic Alliance only after the three controversial issues (construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya, Article 370 and Uniform Civil Code) had been removed from the agenda of the NDA. If any effort is now made to revive them, we shall have to take another road.  
(*The Hindu*, 2 August 2004)

The NDA, which comprised 18 parties in the late 1990s, has shrunk by more than half a decade later. The non-RSS leaders that the BJP had attracted (such as Jaswant Singh, former Foreign Affairs Minister and Yashwant Sinha, former Finance Minister) have been marginalized and/or have left in reaction to the RSS' attitude. As a result, some BJP leaders consider that the party no longer needs to betray its ideology if this does not bear fruits electorally. In fact, RSS leaders may persuade the party to return to its doctrinal roots in order to remobilize its cadres and its core supporters.

## CONCLUSION – AN INDIAN-BASED NEW MODERATION THESIS

The case of the Hindu nationalist parties in India suggests significant amendments to the moderation theory. The thesis assumes that radical parties are likely to dilute their ideology if they become part of a democratic party system and that this process is more or less linear. In India, the inclusiveness of the political system has not been responsible for the moderation of the Hindu nationalist parties over the last 60 years. In fact, there is no linear trend in the career of these parties.<sup>11</sup> They have constantly oscillated between a radical ethno-religious strategy and phases of tactical moderation which did not alter their core ideology. These oscillations may be explained by the interplay of three variables other than the ones proposed by the model.

While the moderation thesis postulates that taking part in electoral competition leads political parties to adopt a less exclusivist agenda, this variable has played a very ambivalent role in India: on the one hand the Jana Sangh has given up its Hindi-only approach of official languages to attract more voters, but on the other hand, the Jana Sangh and the BJP have tried to build Hindu vote banks by polarizing the electorate through communal violence. Electoral competition has fostered ethno-religious conflicts in India. The moderation thesis assumes otherwise, because it has been primarily developed in relation to radical leftist parties which did not indulge in identity politics, and in relation to Catholic parties of European societies. In these societies, the moderation of these parties has resulted as much from the accommodation strategies of party leaders as from a deep secularization process. In India, religion remains a key identity marker that may be used in politics, especially in relation to majority communities like the Hindus at a national level, to the Sikhs in Punjab (the only state in India where they are in a majority), or the Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir. In fact, the moderation thesis is more heuristic in India in the case of political parties that represent minorities, like the Jama'at-e-Islami which has renounced some of its fundamentalist articles of faith, such as the rejection of democracy, in the course of its interaction with democratic practices (Ahmad 2010). Thus, the assumptions of the moderation thesis regarding the impact of electoral competition on radical religious parties need to be qualified: democratic elections may make religious parties even more radical, especially in non-secularized societies and in the case of majority communities

The assumption of the moderation thesis regarding the role of coalitions needs to be refined too. The inclusion of a radical religious party like the Jana Sangh in 1967 or the BJP in 1989 in ruling coalitions at the state level or at the national level did not result in its moderation. Coalitions played a moderating role only when the partners of the Hindu nationalists made their association to the new grouping conditional to a dilution of its ideology, and when the coalition was led by the BJP. Even then, the moderation effect needs to be qualified since neither the BJP leaders nor their coalition partners reacted to the Gujarat pogroms.

Democratic elections and coalition politics are not panaceas in themselves. Their contributions to the moderation of radical religious parties depend upon several conditions. In the case of Hindu

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11. The variations of the Hindu nationalists' strategies are not only observed in terms of time, but also in terms of space. This paper deals with the national leadership only. But state leaders have used their room of manoeuvre for shaping their own oscillations between moderate and radical strategies. Interestingly, the key variables mentioned about the Jana Sangh and the BJP at a national level remain relevant at the state level. The role of elections and coalition making are cases in point. In Gujarat, the BJP of Modi polarized society through the 2002 pogrom and made sure that it drew its electoral benefits by holding elections a few months later. This extremist strategy was made easier by the fact that the BJP did not depend upon coalition partners and did not face strong secularist parties. In Bihar, by contrast, the BJP is associated with the JD(U) in the framework of a ruling coalition. The JD(U) – which is very critical of Modi's policies – cultivates a Muslim electorate, and the local BJP has become so moderate that it has approved positive discrimination measures in favour of the Muslims.

nationalism, three additional variables have accounted for the changing strategy of the Jana Sangh and the BJP: the attitude of its mother organization (the RSS), the self-perception of the Hindu community, and the line of conduct of the other parties, including those in government.

**Table 3. Variables Accounting for the Strategies of the Hindu Nationalist Parti**

Parties	Jana Sangh		BJP		
Phases	Extremism 1951-1967	Moderation 1967-1977	Moderation 1980-1989	Extremism 1989-1998	Moderation 1998-2004
Attitude of the RSS	Uncompromising	Accommodating	Uncompromising	Uncompromising	Accommodating
Hindu sentiments	No sense of vulnerability	No sense of vulnerability	Rising sentiment of vulnerability	Sentiment of vulnerability and desire of self- assertion	No sense of vulnerability
Impact of the coalitions on the parties' strategies	No significant impact	No significant impact	No significant impact	No significant impact	Selectively moderating impact of the BJP-led NDA

The key role of the RSS shows that, contrary to the general assumption of the moderation thesis, political parties sometimes do not emancipate themselves from their mother organization, even in a democratic environment and even when the latter are sectarian to the core. In the case of the Jana Sangh and the BJP, these parties depended upon the RSS not only because their leaders had been trained in this organization, but also because the local cadres remained close to their *alma mater*.

The self-perception of the Hindus in relation to the other communities is the most elusive variable. It has played a determining role in the history of Hindu nationalism; the radical mobilization campaigns of the Jana Sangh and the BJP were only successful when Hindus, collectively, perceived themselves as vulnerable to the threat posed by other communities (including the Muslims) or the secular state. The 1989-1992 Ayodhya affair is a case in point.

Last but not least, the Hindu nationalist parties were forced to moderate when the ruling party made a point that the constitutional principles of the Indian Republic be observed. Nehru and Indira Gandhi (at least during the 1960-1970s) did not give the Jana Sangh any quarter for articulating communal discourses and strategies. Their successors, including Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao were more accommodating and, therefore, undermined the rule of law. For the Indian state – including the judiciary – “locking in” moderation gains would require to implement the principles of the Constitution in an uncompromising way.

**Table 4. The Moderation Thesis and the Hindu Nationalist Parties**

Impact on Radical Religious Parties of...	... Democracy	...Electoral Competition	...Coalition Making
<b>Moderation Thesis</b>	Acceptance of diversity and emancipation from extremist movements.	Dilution of the initial ideology in order to attract new voters.	Partnering with non-radical parties results in moderation of sectarian parties.
<b>Trajectories of Hindu nationalist parties in India</b>	Persisting xenophobia and allegiance to RSS.	Dilution of the Hindi-only doctrine but instrumentalization of Hindu sentiments against religious minorities.	Partnering with non-radical parties did not result in moderation, except <i>to some extent</i> when the BJP needed the support of allies to rule India.

Indeed, the conclusion one may draw from the Indian case is not that democracy is not able to make radical parties more moderate, but that democracy cannot be reduced to elections. Democracy relies also on the rule of law. If this basic principle is not observed, electoral competition may result in “majoritarianism” (Kaviraj 1996), with the religious majority becoming a permanently dominant political majority. Such an ethnicization of democracy would inevitably weaken the rights of the minorities (be they religious or linguistic), whereas these rights are supposed to be protected in a democratic regime. So far, the Indian political system has not shown the capacity to “lock in” the BJP’s moderation process at the center, mostly because its government lacked the political will to enforce the principles of the Indian Constitution.

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